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WHEN I COME BACK

HENRY SYDNOR HARRISON

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By Henry Sydnor Harrison

WHEN I COME BACK.
ANGELA'S BUSINESS. Illustrated.
V. V.'S EYES. Illustrated.
QUEED. Illustrated.

HOUGHTON MIFFLIN COMPANY
BOSTON AND NEW YORK

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TO
THE MEMORY OF
C. H. AND M. C. H.

WHEN I COME BACK

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One day in October, 1918, an American soldier sat in a "little pit" in a wood, writing a letter home. The principal thesis of his letter was jam, cited as "one of the most vital topics about camp now." There was also a good deal about a cup of apple sauce, lately given him by a princely comrade; the repairing of trousers with the aid of a housewife, also a recent gift; wool socks, rainy weather and the prospect of billets; something of small happenings at home. In concluding, the soldier apologized for the material thinness of his letter, saying: "Our days are uneventful, and there is nothing much to say."

The "little pit" which the writer mentioned was an improvised dug-out. The "wood" he referred to flanked the Argonne Forest. The "uneventful days" were the days of the American offensive of

September–November last: the colossal and terrible operation of our armies on the Meuse which, if Marshal Foch's word is worth anything, "broke the Boche's back," and which history is likely to record as one of the great decisive battles of all time.

Soldiers' letters home come pitched in many keys. Much news, and that the most important, is beyond the censor's reach. We read manly soldier-letters and, occasionally, letters that are not so manly; letters buoyant and depressed, imaginative and prosaic, gushing and reserved; letters which are full of unconscious courage and abnegation, and letters — happily few in number — which show the catastrophe of the world conceived as but the sentimental theatre of one small soul. But the point of interest is that behind all the soldier-letters, each according to its kind, we seem to discern, often with great distinctness, the lineaments of the soldier himself. For war is a solvent, and few men can write a

page in earnest without giving themselves away.

What sort of man would it be, then, who was capable of writing, from the Argonne in October, the odd sentence quoted above? A dull man, perhaps, doomed to pass unstirred through stupendous scenes? Or a dumb man — seeing and feeling much, it may be, but unequal even to attempting the swamps of exposition? Or perhaps this was a born soldier, one of that stark company who, frightened and unhappy in a drawing-room, find the naturalness and ease of life released to them under the thunder of the guns? Or possibly, again, the quoted sentence is only a phrase, and other passages will pipe to a different tune?

I have before me almost every letter that this soldier ever wrote; and I can testify, at least, that the extract is characteristic. These letters depict, often with a wealth of detail, a recruit's progress from the first hour of his training; they are written

under every conceivable condition, physical certainly, and, one must suppose, moral and spiritual too. But the air is always remarkably the same. I have read dozens and dozens of these letters, and they make me think of nothing so much as the pleasant account of a summer's outing.

Nor — to discuss that other matter — was this man a natural adventurer, longing for camps and uproars as a thirsty man dreams of running water. As I knew him very well, I may again be permitted to testify. In fact, the chronicler of "uneventful days" was a scholar by taste and inheritance, a lawyer (and a fine one) by profession; and he had literally no touch of that hard simple exuberance of body and soul which normally clamors for "red-blood" exploits. In a lifetime of successful mental activity, he impressed those about him most, I think, with an effect of large powers penetrated and refined, in a peculiar measure, by sensibilities

and subtleties of the spirit. There comes to mind the saying of a distinguished Federal judge, before whom this soldier once tried a case, who knew him only casually: "Few men have ever made such an impression on me of ability, earnestness, candor and sympathy." And with this I link the laughing remark of one of his best friends, long ago: "I am going to have a dinner for your mother and Katharine's mother, and I thought I'd have J. to dine with them — nobody else. For, you know, J. is as gentle as an old lady." Considering his reserve of force, I think indeed that he was the gentlest man I ever knew: the last person, perhaps, that you would have picked from a hundred, or a thousand, as the predestined soldier at arms.

And if it be observed here that this was the marvellous thing about the draft, that it brought together men of every physical and spiritual way of life and welded them into a powerful military unity, I must add at once that this man had nothing to do

with that. He was a volunteer. At the time, he was out of even the probabilities of the draft; indeed — the critical birthday being near at hand — he had to make haste to be admitted on any terms. But the fact was that he made no terms. A responsible, cultivated and complex adult, prospering in familiar and quiet ways, his desire and his accomplishment it was to take his pot-luck with the hearty lads of the National Army.

But I had best leave him to explain himself, and the reader to make his own generalizations. A glance at these strange letters should prove worth while in any case, I think: since it is in the observation of human beings under strain, if anywhere, that we catch fresh inklings of the ranges and reaches of our common nature.

He sat in the bleak glare of a hotel bedroom, and under the friendly obduracy, I never saw him more elusive, less inclined to self-analysis. His intention had just

leaked out, in the most incidental manner conceivable. However, in the end, we got what was no doubt the bulk of his meaning:

"The departments don't need help. More people want those jobs than there are jobs for. You notice that the Judge Advocate General never advertises for men. But every billboard in the country is always reminding you: 'The Army, Navy and Marines NEED you.' Well, I think the place to go is where they need you."

And then, with instinctive avoidance of any taint of the "noble," he fell back immediately upon a characteristic position: "Besides, it's a question of the physical training with me. I think it'll do me lots of good."

There seemed very little more to say. The opportunities for sedentary commissions had been duly urged, the rational arguments fully rehearsed. His mind was made up; he would be an artilleryman. We eyed him, thinking of that last remark. He

was looking very badly. The life insurance companies had turned him away. He was dogged by the shadow of a heritage. Strange-looking candidate for the severe companionship of the guns!

Personal obligations had kept him inactive for many months; he now moved quickly, with an absence of gesture. On a Sunday, a fortnight before his thirty-sixth birthday, he mentioned to the friends he was visiting, at the last moment, that he could n't stay the night: "I must catch No. 2, to go over to the camp and enlist." It was thus that they learned of his design. Three days later, having fortified himself with an enormous luncheon for the weight, he successfully withstood the surgeon's scrutiny: "Try as he would, he could find nothing wrong with me and finally had to admit that I had him beat. I positively slaughtered the eye-tests." It was a matter on which he, and others, had felt some doubt. Possibly over-age fighting men were more welcome in those hours than

some of us supposed. A few days more, and the process of selective "induction" was also a fact accomplished. The thing was done, and with the utmost premeditation. His idea, revealed later, was positive: "If I could get into one of the units here composed of men who have been here since September, I would in effect be catching up about 8 months." If the programme seemed, in the circumstances, rather enterprising, it was destined to work out with mysterious precision. He had enlisted on April 24th. On May 26th — before he had had time to outfit himself — he was embarked for France. On September 26th, when he had been just five months a soldier, he went into action.

These, however, are but the exterior sides of the programme, the sides of its purely mechanical success. What of those other aspects, more subjective and significant? How did this neophyte of Mars, having deliberately imposed the burden of "catching up" on those other disabilities

we have noticed, fare, as man and soldier, in his rapid undertaking?

The rookie's letters may be said to begin on April 22d, the day of his preliminary visit to the camp. They flow on steadily over a period of half a year. They are, in their own way, often minute. But their chief characteristic, as has already been suggested, is in their omissions; and to many natural questions they give no answer whatever.

One day in August, there was a Red Cross entertainment at the Y.M.C.A. hut near Vannes. The 1st battalion of the artillery regiment camped near by was contributing a table and some plates to the affair; an officer, the battalion commander, was also lending his presence: so there sifted downward an order for a spring wagon and a couple of men. One of the men thus detailed was the writer of these letters. He it was who hitched up the wagon — he had had much to do with horses at one time in his life—he drove the parapher-

nalia and the captain to the hut; and he "took out the table and carried it around like Sam Patterson"—the old negro chore-man who did odd jobs at home. Later, standing by for further orders, he saw his young commander — ten years his junior — approach the lieutenant who directed the box-office, and distinctly heard him say: "Do you need any help at the gate? *I have a very good man here.*"

By the mildness of this anecdote, which I skip over to midsummer to extract, and which was set down at all only to make his correspondent smile, the dearth of the evidence on certain important points is made plain, once for all. In all the letters, it is the only passage which reports any outside comment on the writer's progress as a soldier: the captain had called him a very good man. But of course a bazaar is not a belligerent operation, and the captain may have meant only a very good ticket-taker, a very good clerk, or even just a polite, willing fellow who knew his place. At best,

this was n't very much; and the neophyte's purely military career is left, from beginning to end, singularly shrouded. His friends were struck with these silences, and pondered over them.

But as to the more personal phases of the encounter, as to his success in finding, maintaining and enjoying himself in a difficult environment, I think his own unconscious testimony is both interesting and convincing.

The physical reaction was noticed first. "If I feel well, as I expect to," he wrote, just after his enlistment, "I will enjoy it all. I really mean enjoy it." But his feeling well had, indeed, been a question. Poor health had more than once resulted in long diversions of his energies. He could n't take a railroad journey without an aftermath of headache, or get his feet wet without taking cold; and as he took no care of himself, he was always getting his feet wet and always taking colds, and always having headaches. The hard labor of

the camps had seemed as likely to crush him as to cure him. But the fact was that he responded to it instantly and marvellously.

In the first hours, he had eyed with envy the young lads, his new comrades: "It is amazing to see what the military training has done for them — health, carriage, physique, and self-reliance." A little while passed, and we find one of these lads shouting at him, as he stood at guard duty: "Say, you're looking great!" Under the stiff gruelling which never relaxed, cells and tissues too little used in the law thrived and waxed strong. In six months, after his typhoid-inoculation, he never once reported sick. "I am feeling very fit," he wrote in July; and in August, "I am in better physical condition than I have been for years." "I feel fine and have gained a lot of weight." But even earlier, he seems to have attained a bodily competence which asked no favors of the "hardy country boys." Surely there is pertinence in this

little story of the landing at Bordeaux, on June 9:

"We got off the boat about 9 and marched several miles to this camp, which is a sort of rest camp, and everybody was glad to get here. It was a hot day and the men were all rather soft from the trip, and what with carrying blanket rolls and saddle bags several just about gave out. . . . The bunks are in tiers and I drew a lower one, but had the bad luck to have a sick man just behind me, and so had to do the Sir Philip Sidney."

Undisturbed by the hard march, the former lawyer, having bestowed his things, went on to finish the day at kitchen police, an assignment which he took advantage of to eat a tremendous supper, "some cold bacon proving especially delectable."

A few weeks later he wrote:

"It's just as good as Muldoon's and does n't cost anything."

And with his rapidly improving physical estate, we see growing, as rapidly, a wholesome interest in a subject on which

he had hitherto displayed large apathies. As a trencherman, he had been conspicuously squeamish. If an egg impressed him as being no better than it ought to be, he would eat nothing more that meal, perhaps that day. At home, his delicate taste was continually coaxed. Hardly had he come under the rigorous regimen of the camp before we find him disclosing a stronger note, admitting to simple new longings. "Having seen the simplicity and cleanliness of the kitchen arrangements," he confesses within the week, "one has a bolder appetite." On the voyage, the moment that "hearts were brave again," and legs were steady, the novel promptings grew clearer:

"At first the soldiers bought only sweets, ardent, deadly chocolates and things like that. Then came the big waves and seasickness swept like a plague through the hatches and down the scuppers. . . . Tastes now are more moderate. Cans of jam with crackers of various kinds are the favorites now and are pretty good. I have two or three cans of jam and

two boxes of crackers and expect to need a new supply by to-morrow at the latest. . . . When the war is over, I will get a discharge or a leave and you will come over and we will idle and frivol for months, Barbizon, Dijon, Mont St. Michel, Deauville, everywhere. Sunshine and flowers and food. Hevings, how we will eat and drink. I have been thinking abnormally of food ever since I have been on the boat."

Time passed, and the thought came to run through his correspondence like a current:

"The enterprising cooks of Hq. Co. made up a batch of doughnuts and blackberry tarts which we had for dinner to-day, one of each, and I longed for more. . . . Last night a friend gave me quantities of plum jam, spread almost as thick as the bread. . . . I rather hoped we would have bacon and fried potatoes for breakfast this morning and indeed B Battery did have precisely that, but we instead had canned salmon, rice and molasses, a breakfast with an entirely different motif. . . . It was grape and not lacking in succulence. . . . One of the cooks whispered to me that he was going to cook doughnuts this afternoon and to drop around about 3. . . ."

Till finally the once fastidious desire had attained a heartiness that knew no compunctions: "I go strong for highly seasoned foods now — hamburg either of fresh meat or corned beef, heavily onioned, I devour." And he whom the very sight of a too richly-colored butter once sickened could write, all but defiantly: "I have fallen for oleomargarine on hot toast. It is pretty good."

Such cries for replenishment issue only from bodies unprecedentedly put upon. Nor was this, at least, in any sense a comparative matter. Subjected to a training which progressively intensified, all these men, all this young army in the making, were constantly pushed to the limit of their endurance.

In France, after a few weeks, he was detached from the battery and assigned to duty with Headquarters Company. The captain said that he would find this work more interesting, and so he did. It was as

free of monotony as of respites. One large function of the details was communications, including, besides the telephone, "signalling, wigwagging, semaphore, radio, etc." In addition, there were — "observations to be made all the time, and calculations for firing the guns, and instruments to be used. Then there is a good deal of hasty map-making to be done and locating of positions"; also "a lot of courier duty." "The men in our detail have been provisionally assigned to duty," he wrote, in early summer, "and I am classified as one of the scouts, which does n't mean crawling along the ground in fringed leather breeches, but means carrying messages, probably doing some reconnoitring and doing a little of everything. I was awfully glad of it, because I was afraid I might get telephone work. . . . I hate carrying things, particularly with a gas-mask on, and I know of nothing meaner to carry than a roll of telephone wire, ½ mile of it, heavy cable." Later, he was sent to telephone

school; and we hear no more of his preference for other duty. However, at one time or another, he did every kind of work in the detail.

The days were crowded. Telephone school, two sessions daily, occupied some seven hours. Considerable time went to the study of orientation, with practice at field-map making; considerable to mastering the use of the instruments; more still, it would seem, to the "petty round" of smaller, more incidental duties. And of course there were always drills, of many sorts; there were hikes, exercises, mimic operations; in especial, there were the horses. The latter, once they had arrived, became like the artillery's poor; not only were they always there, they incessantly needed ministering to. "Watering horses," he states axiomatically, "is the curse of the artillery." Nor were these animals, alas, able to diffuse a compensating charm, paying their way, as it were, by the affection they inspired. They were "not

pleasant riding horses, but rough cynical beasts." They were — "busters, many of them, I think, Belgian stock, and after seeing them one can understand why Anna of Cleves was offended when she got word that Henry likened her to a Flemish mare. . . . Let no one who likes horses enter a mounted branch."

The sun rose early in the Breton summer, twilight ran long and the dark came late. But —

"I wanted to write you a long letter, but picture to yourself — I have been in the kitchen from 6 this morning till 8 to-night, and then had to do a minimum of shaving."

"But the stable boss made us work right along up to 9:30. I went on guard at 10, walked post until 12, and then slept or tried to sleep till 4, and then up again on post. The day after you are stable guard, you are stable police, so all day Friday I was hard at it as stable police."

"At 12 I had to get up for a couple of hours to unload a truck."

"I expected to read them that night, but had to work for the mess-sergeant until twelve.

Then we got up at 3:30 the next morning to make an early start."

"There is a deal of carrying to be done in the army, officers' baggage from billet to billet and that sort of thing, and privates do all the carrying."

"Monday night, gas and pistol drill until 8:30 by which time it was dark; Tuesday night, stable guard; Wednesday night, watering horses and drill until dark; and Thursday and Friday we were out day and night on a sort of manœuvre; and Saturday night I had to go over my belongings in order to turn in some stuff. There were a few between times early in the week, but I had to spend them in polishing my bits and stirrups."

Novel activities these, and in novel quantities. But we see him attacking them with, at least, a ready will and a cheerfulness which never stumbles. Except in the one matter of the strange delays of mail — which did indeed "infuriate" him, by "the indifference and incompetence this illustrates" — I can find no word of complaint anywhere, from the first letter to the last. On the contrary, all that he offers by way of comment on his situation is warm

and favorable. That early pledge to himself and his friends, that if he felt well, he would enjoy it all, was being redeemed, it seemed, through whatever hardships: "I really am enjoying this a lot, every day." "I am having a fine time." "I go to town about every night and usually have a lot of fun." Such testimony, and there is an abundance of it, may be as good in its way as stimulating comment on strategics and ballistics and the horrors to come. Not much in the "red-blood" scene is so agreeable certainly as these glimpses of a discriminating adult — the only friend I ever had who really read "his" Horace for pleasure, quiet evenings, when nobody was expected to come in and surprise him — continually worked off his feet at hard military and menial tasks — ("yesterday morning we policed up the road, which means picking up cigarette stubs and trash generally, including the relics of old chews") — and as continually congratulating himself on his good luck. That note

never wavers; and his perceptions work on with his reserves, both unchanged. After a day in the stables or the kitchen, tired undoubtedly, wet, cold, and hungry perhaps, he lies on his stomach under the shelter-half, by a guttering candle-end, and thus reports a recruit's progress:

"Several little French girls gathered around as I ate, Gilberte, Yvonne, and I forget the names of the others, and to amuse myself and also to distract their minds from the succulence of my supper, I got them all to singing the Marseillaise, which I always enjoy. The children about here are generally very cute and bright, and already many of them can speak a little English, which they call American. The other day we were out doing a sort of manœuvre and I was running a telephone wire through a fascinating 16th century village built of stone and plaster on the side of a hill, when a tiny girl standing with her brother in a garden called out to me with an interrogative inflection, *Any fun?* I could n't take it in at first that she was talking English and where she learned the words I don't know, but I called them up and identified her meaning by the well-known synonym *s'amuser.*

The children have a passion for learning your name and never seem to forget. The other day I was sitting in headquarters in town when an infinitesimally small French girl stuck her head through the door and called gladly to her older sister, *Jack II—— la!* French pronunciation, and I remembered that they were two little girls I had talked to at least a week before and told my name to."

Or perhaps, having at last received permission to "cease grooming" from a brawny sergeant of the coal-mines, he retires to jot down:

"I wandered into an alley and was confronted by a massive entrance, with an inscription saying that this hotel was the residence of the Governor of Vannes in 1683. You will recall that at that time Louis XIV was getting into middle life but was intriguing with Charles II, who died in 1685, and I think that was about the time that the Elector of Brandenburg got hold of the little principality of Prussia."

Or we may glimpse him perching on the edge of his bunk at dawn, in the rush of reveille, and thoughtfully eyeing the cap-

tain's striker, an able haberdasher's clerk in quieter days:

"I have found him a shrewd and close buyer of chocolates and sweets generally, and I mean to use his services more and more."

About him, all these days, was the teeming life of the young First army; all about, every hour of every day and night, swarmed the young lads of the ranks and guns. In joining this life, he had sought the level. In the first days at the Virginia camp, he was sounded on the matter of a clerk's job, a snug berth doubtless; he evaded it, denying on the direct inquiry that he was fitted for such work. To the first lad who asked him what he did at home, he admitted his lawyership; but he instantly regretted that damaging confession, and his reply to subsequent inquirers was that he "did office work, and if pressed, worked in a law office." His desire, if I am right, had been to become an indistinguishable unit in the fighting army: made up though it was,

for the most part, of men as different as possible from himself.

Here was a man so averse to mere hail-fellow customs that, on the streets at home, he would often take sudden circuitous routes, just to escape a block or two of meaningless propinquity: I have known him to arrive late at his office by reason of these proceedings. Now he had made himself an indissoluble part of vast perpetual propinquities. Of course he was struck, at first, with the "ubiquity" of the Army. "I am in an awfully neighborly spot in the barracks," he notes once, laconically. And at another place he comments more in detail upon the enveloping gregariousness: "There is no spot so remote but that there are dozens of olive-drab figures around you. You can never read a newspaper but that there are ten reading over your shoulder, or a letter without half a dozen standing by to ask if the news is pleasing, and as for eating chocolate, the horizon seems nothing but

a wave of hungry wistful mouths." In this one matter of edibles, necessity had, indeed, developed a convention of theoretic, or constructive, privacy — "since obviously no candy would long stand offering to 30 hungry boys" — but there were difficulties even here: "The package with the chocolate was marked, and the supply sergeant who handed me the package pointedly called my attention to the fact that I was the consignee of chocolate." . . . "Of course it was a mistake to open it in a crowd or semi-crowd, but I am opposed to the side-door method, and anyhow you can't very well be an Achan in the National Army." But such details are noted only for their humor. In truth, it was the huge coördinated democratization of the army which had attracted him from the outset, and now that it folded him closer than a garment, he seems well content.

Much bigger than the small personal invasions was the mighty fraternal sense, and the substantial pleasure to be drawn

from the young companionship. He liked the consciousness of "belonging to an organization of friendly units," and was entertained by little evidences of this: by the fact that you might hail any passing army truck and clamber aboard and save your legs; that "you can call a strange American Bud, Joe, Mac, Big Boy Slim or Heavy with perfect propriety"; and so on. "Although they are all drafted men," he observed once, "I think they pretty generally have the feeling of volunteers." He liked the flavorsome young conversation forever flowing about his ears, the mannish sayings, repeated over and over — "this man's army," "it's a great life if you don't weaken," "when I was in civil life," etc. "The talk in the barracks, particularly about candle-light time when some are in bed and others not, is a treat." And, obviously, he liked the boys, individually and collectively, and enjoyed them all — all that is, except one: "a little ass that I don't like, and he knows it" — "a little dead-

beat" of "inordinate selfishness" — who cadged chocolate sometimes, and at other times gave decided annoyance by his habits of thought and action:

"The same little chap saw me giving some away after supper and came up and asked me if I was selling it. That sort of inquiry is permissible because all sorts of things are sold, but it used to irritate me and even now I am generally moved to point out the obvious absurdity of the question."

Pleasant glimpses are given of the ways and doings of the young army, off duty. For example, there was the common struggle with the strange lingo. Most of the boys had in the beginning faithfully purchased "conversation books," but they were, of course, too good Anglo-Saxons to take the French speech seriously: "The general attitude is like that of the Englishman who closed the argument by saying: 'But it *is* bread, you know — not *pain*.'" However, delightful emergencies arose, as lads returned from evenings in town,

and often the volunteer was able to be of trifling service to his comrades:

"I am going to write a letter for this man, who will give me no directions as to the content of the letter except that it be amply affectionate. . . . He knows not a word of French, but evidently knows the language of the heart and is the envy of his fellows." . . . "Back at our other camp I was called out one day to conduct a conversation with a French girl, Marie Louise, who had walked out to pay a call on a good-looking boy, who would not tell me a thing to say and left me in the dark as to the state of his feelings." . . . "One has written out what he wants to say for me to traduire into French, and the other, a husky corporal from Nicholas, just wants me to say whatever suits the line, calling her Lalage or Doris as I choose." . . . "I have written one to-night to Ernestine, ma chère, saying that her kiss is the sweetest memory of France, of thine, Frank C. My French is uncertain but they don't know it."

"Still," he comments at another place, "the French have ready acquisitive minds and pick up a hint here and a clue there, and thus gather up the tangled strands."

For the lads' part, if they perceived a difference in him, as doubtless they must, they seem at least to have come to overlook it. We see them continually sitting on his camp-stool, pausing to talk while he tried to write, borrowing his writing-board, laving themselves in his basin. He lent them money, sending one to a relative's funeral and setting up another as a barber; he helped them traffic with *blanchisseuses;* one, his tent-mate, he was even "teaching joking, and he liked it wonderful." We further observe him admiring their treasured photographs, experiencing in this duty, if the truth be told, the diplomatic strain at times: "Most of the boys in this room are writing letters. Those that are n't are showing me pictures of their girls. The snapshots I have seen you would n't believe it, and each requiring some appropriate comment." And this, I think, is interesting in a war-letter — characteristically, it is the longest personal bit in all the correspondence:

"The boy on the next bunk almost makes me cry talking of his mother, aged 62, who, he fears, worries a great deal about him. His letters don't get through either. She has knitted him a lot of socks, but he has n't been able to get a request OKed yet. He always speaks of her as *she* and says that he used to dry the dishes for her and sweep and all that. He is 25 with an Irish brogue and merry dark eyes and dimples."

One letter, written on July 14 from the camp near Redon, Brittany, is noteworthy for the number of little sidelights it gives. That day, being France's national holiday, was something like a holiday in the camp; but indeed all this period, seen in the light of what was soon to follow, appears in retrospect like a day of fête.

"One has little amusing experiences if one turns a whimsical face to the world. The other night I was walking to town and overtook an extremely old woman pushing a wheelbarrow full of clothes, or linge. She looked up, stopped me with a gesture and placed the wheelbarrow handles in my hand. I was a little surprised, but trundled it along, and attempted a few mild pleasantries such as, Madame, would you

not like to seat yourself on top also? And, It was indeed good fortune that we have met, madame. But she had absolutely no sense of humor and I could n't raise a smile. Though I did draw a smile from a nice-looking girl whom we passed, and it has been my regret that I did not contrive to make her acquaintance. . . .

Last night I had a good deal of fun. I was given a nosegay in the French national colors at the first place we inquired about wheelbarrows. It was a house with a sign out to do washing, and the lady first thought that we had linen to wash, but hid her disappointment, if she felt any, and interested herself in w'barrows. The flowers gave me the fête spirit, and after that every group of children I saw, I would try to start them to singing the national anthem. Something like Bunker Bean at the tomb of Napoleon. The people here are mostly extremely friendly and the children adore talking to an American, and laugh uproariously at the mildest pleasantry, such as: le chat vous a mangé la langue. I always ask qu'est-ce-que c'est when I don't know a word, and last night I asked a group of little girls what their aprons were in French. They told me, *sallot*, then picked up their aprons and said *la robe*, and then their dresses and said *le jupon*, and would have gone straight through the lingerie department if I had n't said, hold,

enough. . . . I think most of the men have given up studying their books on the French language, but one chap who tents near here is still plugging at it from half a dozen books. He is the only person I ever saw who really says *bong* and *bieng*. I always thought that that *g* was just a joke without foundation before. He calls me into conference frequently and speaking of a French word always says what does that *stand for*, instead of mean, just as though the French tongue had no dignity as the speech of a noble race but were merely an odd cipher or code that was being used hereabouts. . . ."

And the letter of a week later, also from Redon, contains a passage unusual from another point of view:

"This morning I got a pass to go to town to regimental church (after first finding out that it would n't count against me in getting a pass to-night), but the Chaplain and band came out here for a service so I did n't go. The Chaplain is young, apparently of dissenting persuasion, but a nice fellow, and liked by the men who knew him at Camp Lee. The service consisted of a few hymns, a prayer, a reading from scripture, Matthew, I think, Every man who has forsaken mother, brother, sister, etc., and the sermon from that. The service was

out in the open, the men sitting around on the ground with hats removed, and a fringe of French people regarding in wonder — picture to yourself — the way the Americans go to church. The old band-leader lost his stripes and was reduced to the ranks several weeks ago and was playing the snare-drum, and the new one quite a lad, but good. The band wore their hats while playing on the theory that they were on military duty, but took them off too when they became merely congregation. The service really got under one's ribs, not so much the service, but the stereotyped and conventional idea of it — American soldiers singing Nearer My God to Thee in Breton Village — would be written under the wood-cut. Then I was thinking of last summer too. Monday was mother's birthday, when she read *John-Jack* all day. . . . "

I was about to say that this passage discloses the nearest approach to sentiment, to feeling, that one soldier ever allowed himself. But perhaps that is hardly true. Out of the even flow of matter-of-factness, of summer camper's cheerful gossip, there appears one letter, no different from the rest in general content, but with a sud-

den changed beginning—a few words so at variance with the writer's usual self-contained habit that they came upon his correspondent, I know, with the odd impact of shock. What emotion had prompted the brief start of tenderness, so abrupt, so swiftly stifled? As for that, what stifled feeling lies, perhaps, behind many of these gay impassive sentences? Sitting there in his ill-fitting "issue" uniform, his understanding eye fixed on readers a thousand leagues away, writing always of shops and châteaux, of lovable lads and native mites, passing over everything warlike to report his way of undressing "to the point corresponding to pajamas," or extolling the O.D. shirt as "the one perfect garment that man has developed since the Moors invented the chemise" — what is the strange rookie really thinking all the time, thinking and feeling? What are his secret reflections about himself and his situation, what are his anticipations, his hopes or his fears?

To ask such questions of these letters, which seem so engagingly unguarded, is like shouting into an empty house. The silence deepens.

And all this was the gentle summertime of the brigade. "These are our salad days," he notes, and adds, truly: "They cannot last." Already, indeed, they were fading fast. The period of occasional half-idle Sundays, and pleasant evenings in town, fell backward. Now the tide of soldierly activity ran into narrower channels and, more and more, grim purposes obtruded through the not unfriendly routine.

The letter of July 14th had mentioned "rumors no larger than a man's hand" of an impending move. The rumors soon came true. In the second week in August, orders ran, and the brigade was marched away at speed to a new camp. The letter reporting this move, dated August 17, has, for once, almost a martial air. We seem to detect an accelerating pace:

"It fair breaks my heart to have gone so long without writing. But this time it has been absolutely impossible. Day after day my sorrow has grown, as I have stumbled from late work to bed. We have moved. We left the other place getting up at 4 to make an early start and marched 4 days and got here. The last week at the other place there was n't a minute — literally. One would be busy from 7 in the morning until dark. And at noon, say, when you might think one could squeeze a quarter of an hour out of the dinner hour, there would be officers' baggage to carry around, odd uncomfortable war luggage, or some whatnot of that variety. Then since we have been here there have been the horses to attend to, morning, noon and night, one day's kitchen police and jammed days generally. . . . We got horses before we left the other camp and some of us had horses assigned to us. I got a raw-boned gray colt, very much like a mule in outward appearance and in nature too. Then ensued a day or two of feverish packing and on Saturday morning we took the road. We dined — the whole regiment, company by company, — by the wayside, from field kitchens which cook as they go, and reached our first camp at 3 o'clock. Then the picket line had to be put up, horses taken to water, groomed and fed, saddles cleaned and a thou-

sand things. I never saw a more beautiful spot in my life than where we pitched our tents — along a stately avenue lined with beautiful trees and leading to a gloomy almost windowless château, 500 years old. The château was just the kind that James Cabell wrote about in his Brittany stories. I hoped against hope that we would stop over Sunday there, but not so, and we were up at 4 again and in a terrible rush to be off. And so it was each day along the road. We were rushed to death. . . . But I was going to say that I have dressed and undressed in the dark for so long that I would think it immodest to undress by light. Also I can make up my bed, pack my barrack bag and make a blanket roll and everything else in the dark. But it is a bit hard to pick out one's horse in the dark from 100 on a picket line. Then we passed through some villages hundreds and hundreds of years old. Oh, the villages of Brittany! . . ."

This was the march from Camp St. Nicholas to Camp Meucon. For the moment, despite the speed and tension, the move seemed to have no immediate significance, other than to put the gunners at once on the range: I believe there was no range at Redon. In the event, how-

ever, the training at Camp Meucon was seen to have this decided importance: it was the last the outfit was to get, and it was unexpectedly, indeed unbelievably, brief.

The whole plan of the American operation in France was, in fact, suddenly shifted, under the lightning stroke of a great idea. Henceforward events moved ever faster, and the day of glory stood near at hand.

As is now well known, the American military programme had from the beginning fallen roughly into three parts. It was ordained that in the summer of 1918 our armies should move against, and wipe out, the old salient at St. Mihiel; the winter of 1918–1919 — the vital second link in the plan — they would spend in reorganization, hard training in the light of the summer experience and the systematic absorption of enormous reinforcements from home; and in the spring of 1919, now thoroughly prepared, bountifully equipped

and supplied, and in full strength, the young armies would make a supreme bid for victory on the line of the Meuse-Argonne. Plotted out and developed at a time when the German military power was at its height and "the United States had not as yet a single full division in France," this plan had stood, intact, for more than a year: it possessed the dignity of age. But now, in the late summer of 1918, there came electric happenings on the western front, sudden strange signs, hardly credible symptoms; and a window opened upon a startling possibility. Into the mind of the great Marshal, in short, there had flashed a thought as instant and bold as genius. What about eliminating the second link in the operation altogether? What if now, and not next year, was the moment for the decisive pounce?

To fail with an idea so large and hazardous would be a failure indeed. To succeed with it completely meant the shortening of the slaughter by many months.

It was determined, in the upshot, that the mighty object was worth the mighty risk.

So it was that, while the staff and young organization were still heavily taxed with preparations for St. Mihiel, orders went out for the far larger undertaking.

It was, indeed, a stupendous project. Through four years, this sixteen-mile front of forest and hill had been celebrated for its impregnability. The British and French had attacked in Flanders and Champagne; they had never attacked here. "No sector in the old German lines was considered more redoubtable. . . . The Hindenburg Line was not stronger than the Meuse-Argonne, while, once the Hindenburg Line was broken, the country beyond was much more favorable for rapid advance." With a veteran army and under the most favorable circumstances, the enterprise offered difficulties little short of staggering. But the army now called on to attempt it was not veteran, and the cir-

cumstances, in many ways, were as unfavorable as possible.

The sentences quoted above were written by Lieutenant-Colonel Frederick Palmer, official observer with the American Army. I cannot do better than borrow further from Colonel Palmer's account of the preliminaries of this great action:

"We had thirteen days from Saint-Mihiel 'D' day (the day of attack) to the Argonne 'D' day in which to move all our troops and all they required, to bring up our heavy guns, prepare our ammunition dumps and depots, assemble our transport, and school our divisions in their task. The British new army had taken five months in preparing for the Somme in 1916. . . . We had none of the older veteran divisions to spare for the first shock of the attack which was to break the fortified line. All were in the Saint-Mihiel operation, and when they came out they would be exhausted and require rest. So we summoned divisions from quiet trench sectors, from the training grounds in France — divisions hardly yet acclimatized and with their training yet incomplete. . . . Some of our divisions were without artillery, while Allied divisions had had team

play with their artillery units for four years, and nearly all our divisions were short in some sort of equipment. Artillery brigades received their guns one day and were off to the front the next. . . . All the movement must be at night, without lights, to avoid detection. Units withdrawn from Saint-Mihiel had to cross the streams of traffic running to the Saint-Mihiel front. Tractor-drawn heavy material, which could go only three or four or five miles an hour, limited the speed of motor transport that could go twenty in the solid columns which occupied the roads. . . . Our different corps headquarters had had only four days on the ground to familiarize themselves with the situation. Our divisional commands had even less. . . . Our men were exhausted by their hard marching and their arduous labor, and our officers by the pressure of their responsibilities and their apprehension in trying to have all details ready. . . . Our engineers . . . occupied in the Saint-Mihiel operation, could not arrive till the day before the attack. They ought to have been in the Argonne as soon as our troops began to move, but we had not enough engineers to look after two great battles at once. . . ."

Part of one of those divisions "hardly yet acclimatized and with their training

yet incomplete," the young artillery brigade whose making we have glanced at (or been cajoled into glancing away from) had got its orders, like the rest. From the summer quiet of the preparation grounds it passed, prematurely, into the vast turmoil of coming action. On September 14 — less than a month after the arrival at the new camp — in trains of box-cars, it joined and swelled that sudden thick movement which was precipitating, ever more and more densely, behind the dark forest. On September 19th it detrained at Souilly, northwest of Verdun, and went up, hard marches, by foot and wagon. On September 24th, it took positions for the attack, then scheduled to begin next day. On September 26th — for at the last moment the launching of the bolt was postponed twenty-four hours — it was putting down its first barrage.

The villages of Brittany were behind, indeed. The salad days were gone, to return no more. Now the meaning of those

days was to be searched out to the uttermost, and the soldier, each for himself, must stand for his final accounting. From Vienne-le-Château to Regnéville, the American armies, early that morning, swarmed over the top, and the greatest battle in our history had begun.

Into the complex operations which followed I must not try to enter. Of twenty-two divisions which played their hard part in them, our concern is with a single detail of a single regiment; of 650,000 ready soldiers, we follow the fortunes of but one.

The volunteer who had once "worked in a law office" had, of course, his small duty to discharge. He was now, as he had noted a few weeks earlier, "mostly a telephone man." It was the function of the telephone detail to set up and operate the battalion switchboard, and maintain the lines which fed it. No one, I suppose, would call this a sinecure job, like carrying tables at

charity bazaars. The switchboard was a busy one, incessantly so, in fact: it carried twelve "drops," and in these days and nights was chronically "two drops behind." There was also the question of maintenance in motion — a matter of consequence, since the fate of an army may hang upon the speed and efficiency of its communications. Even he, in the summer, had conceded something here: "Telephones are a very important element of modern fighting . . . particularly if things are on the move and we have to establish new lines from time to time." Well, things were on the move in the Argonne in September-November, very much so. With an advance averaging more than a kilometre a day, the establishment of new lines is in practice, no doubt, a constant activity. And finally there was the fact, not mentioned by the writer, that existing lines, when destroyed by fire, must at all hazards be reëstablished immediately. So it happens that the duty of the telephone

detail often leads it where the shells fall thickest.

And these functions were in this case intensified by the fact that the brigade's service proved to be continuous. As the operations went on, many units were taken out for rest and reorganization; some, relieved within the first week, were never sent in again; but I think I am right in saying that this brigade was never relieved, and as it was in the battle at its beginning, so it was there at the end and through the middle, and never rested. With troops so new, the strain, I should think, must have been considerable.

None of this, however, appears until later. Not much, of course, will be expected from a war-correspondent whom we have already found dismissing these as "uneventful days." The letters become rarer, a little scantier in texture; with the growing meagreness of range, the writer may be conceived as put to it, now and again, for subjects. But he pursues with

undiminished ease the cheerful tenor of his way.

On September 19, from or near the town of Souilly, he wrote: "I suppose in a general way we are working in the direction of the front, and take this occasion to tell you that when we do get there, if we ever do, we won't be exposed to any real danger." Doubtless he knew then, in common with the rest of the brigade, that they were going in immediately; that for nothing else than to go in immediately they had hastened to that point. On September 24, the eve of the battle, he found time to scribble briefly, — beginning with comments on the army's "facetious throwing off on the queer-speaking froggies," and chatting of everything except the war. In the days of intense preoccupation which followed, two letters came from him, both long ones. Not only do they give no hint that he is in the fighting; unless read with the greatest dexterity, they seem to declare positively that he is not in the fight-

ing, or even very near it, and not at all likely to be.

Thick and steady is the veil held before the clash of armies; all is misted with gentle phrases. First view of the "grim visage," and two weeks' unremitting contact with it, is thus disposed of: "We have been living in the woods mostly since we left Camp Meucon. There are rumors now that we will quit the sylvan life in a few days and go into billets." Introduction to a dug-out — the "little pit" — results in a genuine tribute: "I was fascinated by this manner of living after I had spent a night with one of the boys who had found him a pit, and so I got one of my own." The whole existing situation is even indicated as a distinct improvement over the old laborious days, since (manifestly) — "we are n't having regular formations, réveille, retreat and that sort of thing, which is a great relief." Three weeks more of fighting — the "rumors" of impending retirement proving, this time, anything but

well-founded — and he accounts for himself with signal succinctness (October 27): "We have been circulating around behind the front lines where the fight is going on and we have n't seen such a great deal of it." The bloody advance appears again only as an inconvenience to a well-intentioned correspondent: "About not writing, we have n't been so awfully busy, but moving around disorganizes things and about the time one's living arrangements are systematized, and tablets pop out of haversacks and postal communications are established, the order would come to make up blanket rolls and move out, and then we march on a piece and pitch camp again." From which courteous locutions, we observe him turning gladly to solider stuff: "When I come back I certainly do mean to spend a long time in your apartment, chiefly on your large couch, and you are quite right in thinking that jam and jam tarts will strike the right note with me. . . ."

That consummate phrase, "the sylvan life," would have satisfied most reticences, I think. But the strange rookie, moving how rapidly toward his veteranship, was not content with merely passive reassurances. Aware that he must pass the scrutiny of eyes accustomed to read between his lines, and now perhaps sharpened by concern, he perceived that something positive would be the "right note" from him. One pictures him as frankly cudgelling his brains a little, frankly drawing on his legalistic training, before he set down this:

"I am afraid you are worried by the idea that our regiment is participating in the drive and shooting and getting shot, so as soon as we pull out of this wood I think I will send you a cable to let you know that I am not grappling with the Hun and charging his machine-gun nests."

Could any sentence seem to say more that it does not say? I think it is a masterpiece of kind cunning. Perhaps it took him as near to a lie as he had ever come,

to that time. For he was to go nearer still. He was in for it now; he had his battle-note, and the point was to strike it too hard to be doubted. In his effort of October 27th, a letter exceptionally cheerful and casual, he rose, through deafening detonations and appalling sights, to his finest fancy:

"As I wrote you before, I am not in any danger, nor likely to be."

Five days later, all his reserves still impenetrable, he was killed at his duty by a German high-explosive shell.

It was the morning of November 1st, a famous day. On that day the battle passed into a new stage, the third and the last. The forest was behind, the way was straight; the advance was to be headlong now. The American guns, largely increased in number since the beginning of the battle, had opened early, the full length of the line: a general attack was to follow. Preparations for the certain move were under way. It was "a bright day in

the Argonne region, fit for the triumph which it was to bring."

The telephone man was out of the fox-hole; he stood in the road reeling in lines which presently would be set up again, so much nearer Germany. The position became less and less comfortable, as the enemy's counter-fire grew hotter. The little wood near by was being heavily shelled; other points were raked with an intermittent fire. However, new lines, as we know, must be established "from time to time"; and the work went steadily on.

Suddenly, in the loud sunshine, a shower of large calibre shells fell on the other side of the road — the Cunel-Romagne road, it was — too close for ease. An eye in the clouds, perhaps, had seen those small purposeful figures, active and exposed on the highway. There was a brief interval; and then from the void came the noises of a new *arrivé*, single, nearer still. The telephone men took the ground, faces down, as their need was. But the volunteer was

on his feet again almost at once; for he was chief linesman now, and the duty was pressing. Yet it could hardly have been so pressing as that, I think: since this was none other than the black shell, carrying death. Having sprung up, he was seen, abruptly, to take a few uncertain steps toward the "little pit"; and then, as suddenly, he fell.

From the dugouts, men came running. From the ambulance ran the doctor and his men. But it was seen at once that there was nothing to do. A tiny sliver of the flying shell had penetrated the heart; death was all but instantaneous. The men of the detail went back to their posts, for there was much to do that day; and the men from the ambulance carried the volunteer away.

The memorable advance began, and continued, according to the plan. Our young brigade maintained the good reputation it had already earned. In its continuous service, it was attached successively to five different infantry divisions, and won warm

praise from all of them; it was several times cited in orders, and received the highest commendation from General Headquarters. Nowhere did it do more to deserve its honors than in the drive upon Buzancy which began that morning; they had the town on the following night. In accomplishing these successes, the lads of the details contributed their little integral parts, like the others. They moved with the wheeling batteries; they labored long without food or sleep; night and day they passed where the shells fell thick. All struggled gallantly to the common end, and in the detail of the 1st battalion, new hands set up the busy switchboard and new eyes saw that the lines ran true.

To die in battle is in itself, of course, no proof of the heroic quality. In the colossal organized industry which is modern warfare, it too often seems, indeed, that the element of choice is virtually eliminated. Once the human atom is caught in

the vast convolution, however willingly, his progress appears inescapable; he is regimented, mercilessly deindividualized, and it is luck that makes him or destroys him. Thus many persons have been oppressed by a sense of meaninglessness, or at least of afflicting impersonality, in the deaths of individuals in this war. Where men are herded like sheep to the shambles, who shall find glory?

Such despair is natural; but in the end, I think, it is clearly seen to be more imaginary than real. The truth is, and must be, that under the systematized dead-level mass of "casualties," we shall find spiritual ranges and moral choices as wide and thrilling as in the days of Homer.

In this simple story I have told how one American, gifted and mature, moved by no compulsion but that of his own theory of becoming conduct, offered himself as a soldier in the ranks; how he met his profound experiences, so far as he allowed one to judge, with fine nonchalance, refusing

to be changed at all by them; and how, at his task on a morning that history will not forget, his free offer of all that he had was violently closed with. Based as it is on the man's own letters, which abound in omissions, this story has been seen to be curiously incomplete. The most important questions are never touched, and the quality of the strange rookie's service, as man and soldier, was an enigma to the end.

I put the story down chronologically, and this is the way it happened. The enigma long remained. It was a long time after the soldier's death that his family learned even the fact; much longer before they learned anything more. When the first details came, he had lain many weeks in the little military cemetery by Romagne. But the letters, when they did come, were found to tell much. They round out the story perfectly, and they do it with an authoritativeness that may be accepted as final: since few secrets, I take it, are hid

from our constant companions in a mortal peril.

The young men's letters tell us how, behind his haze of winning phrases, the gentle lawyer, whom the life insurance companies had rejected, had been earning a special name for careless intrepidity: while, in a more personal way, among the lads who did indeed perceive his differences, he had won a place, as I view it, still more honorable and rare.

In the presence of death, this man had denied that he was in danger, or likely to be. Long afterward the battalion commander — the same young officer who had spoken him well at the Red Cross fair — told me that the work he was doing, through these five weeks, was perhaps the most dangerous in the brigade. But this negligence of the reality was not, it seemed, a mere amiable conception of well-bred correspondence. One of the lads of the telephone detail, after months, records:

"I have been out over the lines with him many times, and on one occasion gave him a call down for doing the very thing that afterward caused his death, and that was jumping up too soon after the shell had landed, but as he knew no fear he only laughed."

Similarly, the young lieutenant who commanded the detail, having cited the marked readiness and dependability exhibited in "many a hard and dangerous task," sums up:

"He was known among the detail for his bravery."

Another of the lads writes:

"I once heard one of his officers remark, 'H—— is the bravest man on the front.'"

In July, from Redon, he had written a chance cheerful sentence, his sole comment upon himself as a soldier — "I have a secret conviction of not being of as much use as these hardy country boys." It is pleasant to set beside this typical pronouncement the evidence of the boys themselves. But if a more formal answer

to that disparagement seems desirable, I find it in a sentence as brief, written by his captain when the battle was over:

"There was no man in the company who more endeared himself to those with whom he worked, or who did better work than he."

Few things are more certain than that, in untried emergencies, a man can improvise nothing: all his reliance is in his own store, silently amassed through the years. Rarely before, in his life, perhaps, had this man been tested for physical courage; yet tributes such as these, and they were many, surprised no one who knew him. More striking, as I say, is the purely personal testimony, springing so spontaneously in the strange environment. "From my first acquaintance with him," the courtly Federal Judge had written, "I coveted the privilege of closer association and friendship. Notwithstanding his great modesty, there was in him that magnetic quality which would make every good man aspire to better things." I think it is affecting to

find the "hardy country boys" of the guns moved to expressions not dissimilar:

"He was one of the best friends I ever had and one of the most unselfish and best-natured men I ever met."

"He was one of my best friends and about the finest fellow I ever met. . . . There was not a better man than he on the front."

"Everybody in the outfit felt that he had lost the best friend they ever had and I am shure that I did."

"In a couple of minutes they were at his side but the best friend I had in the army, a man loved by every boy in his company, was breathing his last."

Yet, as this must be, after all, a military record, I shall leave the last word to the company commander, who, referring to the "many stories and praises of him that I have heard both from his comrades and officers," concludes:

"One thing stands out in all these accounts — his unfailing willingness and cheerfulness when he and everyone else were discouraged and exhausted by the terrific work that the

telephone men had to do in the campaign. If there was another job to do it was always he who volunteered first and then encouraged the others with him. . . . By doing his bit and more than his bit, no matter how hard or dangerous it was, he made the men around him braver and better soldiers."

I think these brief passages suffice to fill out the silences and make my story complete. The official citation for "deeds of heroism and gallantry," which followed months later, seemed but the formal confirmation of a record already perfectly established. Perhaps — who knows? — I was wrong to say earlier that this man was not, all along, a natural soldier.

Seeing complex and brilliant organisms crushed out, where mere bodies would do almost as well, we are appalled by a sense of waste. And yet, by a paradox, it is through such a sense only that we derive an authentic inspiration. It is not in rationality, not in gifts thriftily husbanded or acts reasonably computed, that we find the mysterious and magical essence. It

takes the purple flower of recklessness to make the heart beat faster; and the lives of many accomplished men, who died in bed, have been soon forgotten. "And economically speaking, I expect I made a mistake," he had added, in that moment of casual self-thought. He had, of course; but who will say that he had not chosen that better part by the side of which sound economics is like a little thumb-rule in a dusty book? In the spectacle of the exceptional man running, with pure simplicity, to the anonymous common task, in the rare and subtle life flung out as carelessly as the ploughboy's, we intuitively perceive a quality which is better than reason. Such acts fire the blood of the dullest, and live on, working beyond knowledge.

I tell this story, not as a record of achievement, but rather as a tale of a lamp set on a hill. All his life, by the secret springs that make men what they are, this man sought to do well inconspicuously.

But his gift was always rather too big for that; the bushel could never quite hold the light. And in the end, as I see it, his exposure was dazzling and complete. Deliberately imposing obscurity upon himself, he found it impossible to remain obscure. Having performed the feat of becoming a soldier, he became an example to soldiers; what impelled him to volunteer once impelled him to go on volunteering — "always the first"; and when he died, among a thousand gallant deaths, his death was memorable and distinguished. But I see no change here, no revelation. Devotion to an ideal of magnanimous behavior, not conditioned or qualified by the smallest regard for himself, had marked this man throughout his life; and if he won the love of young soldiers in a camp or a pit, he had been not less blessed in more familiar surroundings. His great exploit at the wars was only this: that he kept on being himself. I see him as these lads picture him — never tired, never complaining, always cheer-

fully ready for the next job, no matter what, starting suddenly from sleep to ask if the lines were all right, setting out in the dark, death falling on every hand, to find the break in the wire, and finding it and mending it though it took all night. And then I think of him as I saw him last, sitting on the bed's edge in the dismal hotel room, looking, I must say, like a sick man, but confessing, with reluctance and gentleness, an iron creed:

"The Judge Advocate General's office does n't need men. Well, I think the place to go is where they need you."

But words only blur the sharp outlines of deeds which proud men, passing willingly on, have preferred to leave wrapped in silence. "Our days are uneventful and there is nothing much to say." Under the stillness which nothing ripples shines out, more brightly, the harmony which nothing flawed: and so it is that, to the eye of the fancy, he comes back living from the battle. That reunion he spoke of was not

to be in the flesh. But the principle which put forth the last full service, as a living plant blows one more blossom, easily dissociating itself from the wooden cross and the foreign field, stands mysteriously recreated; and the recognition of the familiar beauty stirs in the heart, in very truth, like the springing welcome to a friend come home. All who have shared in these remeetings — and they are many now — have known themselves to stand in the presence of immortality.

THE END

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